DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 065 FL 019 025

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TITLE The Contributions of Systemic Linguistics to Mother Tongue Education as Developed in Australia.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the World Congress of Applied Linguistics sponsored by the International Association of Applied Linguistics (9th, Thessaloniki, Greece, April 15-21, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Foreign Countries; *Linguistic Theory; *Literary Genres; *Native Language Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; Registers (Linguistics); *Systemic Grammar

ABSTRACT

The study of systemic functional linguistics has been particularly relevant to the development of an educational linguistics. Recent theory has viewed language as a tool for mapping experience, with semantics and grammar treated as interrelated, not distinct. To the systemicist, one of the greatest theoretical challenges has been how to account for the manner in which text relates to context. The general response has been in the form of register theory. Systemicists tend to differ over their approach to register theory, principally in the issue of genres and how they are conceived. It is the view of recent Australian systemicists that the terms genre and register are not interchangeable and that both notions are necessary. Australian educational linguists have been seeking to identify the genres valued in the culture, most notably for reading and writing, so they may be made overt objects of teaching and learning in school. A social theory is involved here, with consequences for a pedagogical theory. Genre theorists have been unfairly criticized. Systemic linguistics can assist in the study of educational processes and practices. A 35-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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ED327065

The contributions of systemic linguistics to Mother Tongue Education as developed in Australia.

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A paper presented at a Symposium on
Usefulness for Mother Tongue Education
of Research in Related Fields of Study,
organised by the Scientific Commission
on Mother Tongue Education at the
9th World Congress of Applied Linguistics,
Kalithea, Greece, 15-21 April 1990.

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Introduction

Professor Gagne asked participants to this Symposium to address four questions relevant to any definition of mother tongue education, or indeed to any definition more generally of an educational linguistics. In my contribution to the Symposium I shall propose the particular relevance of systemic functional linguistics to the development of an educational linguistics. I want firstly to sketch in an overview of the theoretical position involved in using systemic linguistics in education. Secondly, in the light of my observations I shall offer some possible answers to Professor Gagne's questions.

Systemic functional theory

The use of systemic linguistic theory to address educational questions is not new. As many people at this Symposium will know, Halliday directed the Nuffield/Schools Council Programme on Linguistics and English Teaching. (See Thornton, Mackay, Schaub, Thompson & Pearce, 1989) for a discussion of this Programme and its impact) This led among other things to the development of Breakthough to Literacy (Mackay, Thompson, & Schaub, 1979) Language in Use, Language and Communication 1 and 2 (Forsyth & Wood, 1977, 1980) as well as a number of other publications relating to language and learning, several of which continue to have currency to this day.

Since Halliday came to Australia in 1976, a number of systemicists have emerged. Some of them, like J.R. Martin, continue to work as theoretical linguists, in his case at the University of Sydney, while others, such as myself, work in educational institutions, and may be styled educational linguists. The most important point to make about systemic theory for the purposes of this symposium is that it is also a social theory. Thus, when Halliday proposes (e.g.1975, 1985, Halliday & Hasan1985) that language is a social semiotic with which we build meaning, he is actually proposing a particular theory of human experience and of the role of language in this experience. It is a social theory having consequences for one's view of all human endeavours,

including educational ones. It is a theory of human experience as something socially constructed. In this theory, the job of the linguist, like that of other semioticians, is to understand how experience - including identity itself - is constructed in social processes.

Drawing upon various traditions of scholarship associated with such figures as Malinowski (1923, 1935), Sapir (1963), Whorf (1956), Berger and Luckman (1966), Firth (1956, 1968) and Bernstein (1973a, 1973b, 1975,1982,1986), among others, Halliday actually sees language as a tool with which we map experience - a kind of calculus with which we make sense of the world. Conventional distinctions between semantics or meaning on the one hand and grammar or syntax on the other, do not apply. That is because the lexicogrammar (a term Halliday prefers) is understood primarily as a meaning system. To study any instance of use of the lexicogrammar is simultaneously to investigate both *what is meant* and *how it is meant.* The two are held to be inseparable.

The relationship of text to context is in this tradition of thinking a particularly intimate one. Text comes into being because of the demands of context. Equally, context is knowable because of the particular text involved.

Genre theory and systemics

To the systemicist one of the most important theoretical challenges has always been how to account for the manner in which text relates to context. The general response to this challenge has been developed in terms of register theory, and its associated notion of context of situation, a term taken from Malinowski (1923). That is to say, the particular shape or structure of a text is held to come into being in response to the demands of the context of situation, where three sets of conditions are of concern: the *field* or social activity in the context; the *tenor* or set of relationships of the participants in the context; and the *mode* or role that language itself takes in the context. Apart from the term 'context of situation', Malinowski also proposed that of

'context of culture' (1935), a term with which he sought to acknowledge that the wider culture has an impact upon the production of any text, as well as the immediate context. As a case in point, most cultures have trading encounters, but they differ depending on the particular context. In addition, within any context of culture, there are several instances of trading encounters, responsive to the particular context of situation of concern at any given time. The distinction between context of situation and context of culture is an important one and I shall return to it shortly.

Systemicists tend to differ over the manner in which they propose a theory of register. The main difference that has emerged of recent years has been over the issue of genres and how they are conceived. About this it will be necessary to say a little, since it is relevant to the educational linguistics still in development in Australia. When Halliday and Hasan (1976) produced their book on Cohesion in English, they used the terms 'register' and 'genre' interchangeably, as indeed they have continued to do (see e.g. Hasan in Halliday & Hasan, 1985). That is to say, the text that is found in any context of situation has a particular overall shape or pattern which in their terms may be thought of as a register or a genre. Other systemicists - most notably Martin (1985) and various post graduate students who have worked with him at the University of Sydney (e.g. Ventola, 1984, Plum, 1988, Christie, 1990, Rothery, in prep.) - have come increasingly to propose that genres and registers differ. Register relates to context of situation, but genre relates to context of culture. Genres represent staged, purposive ways of doing things in a culture (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987):

> Genres are referred to as *social processes* because members of a culture interact with each other to achieve them; as *goal oriented* because they have evolved to get things done; and as *staged* because it usually takes more than one step for participants to achieve their goals. (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987, 59)

Genres are thus thought of as artefacts of the culture, and as such they are learned. Registers represent the choices made in language in response to the particular context of situation. In practice, as the evidence certainly seems to suggest, the same generic types will be selected for use with respect to various contexts of situation and registers. The point can be explained the most readily by reference to an example.

Texts 1 and 2 are two instances of a particular type of narrative genre found in English speaking cultures, especially among children's story books. The principal elements of schematic structure or steps found in the two texts are identified.

Text 1

The kangaroo who lost its tail

Orientation/Complication

A long time ago there was a kangaroo who did not have a tail and all the animals laughed at him and that made him sad

Resolution

How did he get it back? He got it back by dipping his tail into lolly-pop siarp (syrup). The animals started to like him and then they played with him.

Coda

Would you like it? I would not because it would be most anno(y)ing.

THE END

Text 2

The happiest day of my life*

Orientation/Complication

One day a storm fell on my town. The Queen's henchmen were after me. I was cursed. They chased me through fields and finally in a shed. It was dark and spooky.

Resolution

There was a flashing. It was a knife plunged into my heart and I was dead.

Coda

Moral

Death may be a fantastic experience.

(* This text comes from the work of J.R.Martin & Joan Rothery.)

The two texts have the same elements of schematic structure, though in fact the two stories are about quite different things. In other words, both select the same generic structure, taken from the English speaking culture in which the two young writers have grown up. The two differ in terms of register and context of situation. In terms of *field*, Text 1 deals with the imagined experience of a kangaroo. In terms of *tenor*, its writer takes up an authoritative role vis a vis the reader, and the mode is written, wholly constitutive of the activity. In the case of Text 2 the *field* is the imagined experience of being chased and put to death. The tenor is also authoritative, though here an ironic point is intended, since the writer (who is older than the writer of Text 1) is satirising a particular type of genre. The mode is again written and constitutive of the activity.

In sum, it is the view of the recent Australian systemicists that the terms genre and register are not interchangeable, and that notions of both are necessary. They are necessary in order to explain how the two writers of Text 1 and 2 were able to select the same genre but make different choices with respect to the immediate register. The one set of choices relates to context of culture, while the other relates to context of situation.

Now how is all this relevant to an educational linguistics and to a theory of a mother tongue education? It is relevant because it helps explain the underlying purposes of many of the educational linguists working with genre theory in Australia for some years. Such theorists have been seeking to identify the various genres valued in the culture - most notably those valued for writing and reading as a part of an education - so that these can be made overt objects of teaching and learning in schools.

A social theory is involved here, having clear consequences for a pedagogical theory as well. The social theory, alluded to already above, sees human experience as something socially constructed. Language is

the social semiotic used by persons as they negotiate and construct their sense of their world. Learning language, as Halliday put it some years ago, is learning how to mean. Genres are ways of meaning in a culture, and the young are to be seen as initiates in the culture. The learning of genres, then, is a necessary part of learning the culture.

Controversies over genre theories

Genre theorists have been perceived as quite controversial, sparking lively debates through the pages of a number of journals. I shall comment briefly on the principal sources of the debates, because these relate to differences about pedagogical theory, and as such they are relevant to the overall concerns of this symposium with a developing theory of Mother Tongue Education. The two most common criticisms are in fact related. On the one hand it is sometimes said that genre theorists aim to identify and teach valued genres because control of these is associated with conformity to the status quo. In fact, genre theorists, it is said, would teach for obedience to the status quo, when the true object of an education should be to liberate, teaching students to express themselves "in their own language", and choosing their own genres.

The other criticism is along the lines that genre theorists are too concerned with the "products" of learning, while they pay insufficient attention to "processes". The processes of learning are more important than the products, it is said. In that genre theorists appear to stress the importance of genres, understood as "products", they are held to have a "transmission theory of teaching and learning": the teacher "holds all the knowledge" and "transmits" this to the students.

Both criticisms do not in fact reflect an accurate reading of what genre theorists have written. In addition, both rest on certain assumptions about pedagogy that genre theorists do not accept. I shall comment briefly on these matters, taking the former criticism first: namely, the charge that genre theorists would teach for conformity to the status quo. I find this a particularly unacceptable criticism. That is because it

is only ever made by people skilled in using many of the genres for writing which one would seek to teach others. Such people, it needs to be pointed out, do not see themselves as merely tools of the status quo, but rather as persons able to develop and sustain expressions of opinion of various kinds in independent ways. Why then, do they assume that when, among other things, we seek to teach the genres of argument and opinion in schools, we are preparing the young for conformity and unthinking obedience to the "status quo"?

Behind the arguments of the critics involved here lies a commitment to a rather romantic view of the writer: as one who achieves individuality and creativity in writing out of a rather private and inner pursuit. In this view, individuals create their own forms for writing, where they meet minimal constraints from others. For teaching purposes, such a view would suggest, the role of the teacher is as a "facilitator" only, nurturing young writers in their independent journeys as they learn to write. More overt intervention from the teacher is an unacceptable intrusion into the rights of the child writer. Most recently, in Australia at least, the work of Graves (1981, 1983) has popularised such a view, but in fact, its origins are very much older. Historically, it owes a great deal to the romantic movement in literature dating from the late eighteenth century on. It is significant, in this connection, incidentally, that one critic, (Dixon, 1987) quotes the romantic poet Blake, in discussing his reservations about genre theory.

In another sense the romantic view of the individual learning to write may be placed as one of a number of interrelated themes in curriculum theory generally, and in language curriculum theory specifically, dating from the 1960's. These matters I have reviewed at length elsewhere (Christie, 1989). Suffice it to note here that since the 60's we have witnessed in Australia, in common with the U.K., and in parts at least of the U.S.A., trends in curriculm theory and in mother tongue education theory which have extolled a view of the learner as "individual" and the teacher as "facilitative" of individuals' learning processes. In this view, the child writer's creativity must be allowed to flower in an environment which is supportive certainly, but one in

which the teacher largely reacts to what is written, leaving it to the child to propose most of the agenda for writing. Gilbert (1989, 1990) is one of several critics who have shown the poverty of such an approach, not least because it is naive about the nature of creativity, about the nature of texts, and about the nature of the relationship of texts to each other.

Overwhelmingly a romantic approach fails because it lacks any sense of the social, and of the manner in which persons shape and define themselves in social processes. How is the individual known and recognised? How does he or she achieve individuality? Where does the capacity to be "creative" or "individual" derive? What is a text, and how are we to explain it, other than by reference to many other texts? Texts have status and identity, after all, only in so far as they can be defined in their relationship to other texts, and here all the issues to do with intertextuality as Bahktin (1984) discussed it come into play.

Persons achieve individuality in social processes, using the resources available to them within their culture in order to create. One such basic resource is one's language. The ways of working in one's language are learned, and once learned, such ways are open to the individual to manipulate, to adapt and to change, opening up new kinds of meaning and self expression.

Those curriculum theorists and teachers who would deny that patterns of working in one's language are learned, or that individuality is itself shaped out of participation in social processes tend to leave their students largely to work matters out for themselves. In this sense, whether they acknowledge it or not, they behave irresponsibly, advantaging those in the school system who are already advantaged, while offering little, or at least insufficient assistance to those students who are in greatest need. That is because an invisible or hidden curriculum comes to apply in any teaching/learning situation in which the criteria for success remain implicit, rather than explicitly available to the learners. Where these criteria remain implicit, those students who, because of family background and life experience, function with

modes of working in language valued by schooling will always be advantaged over students whose backgrounds and experience are of a different order. This is the kind of concern to which Bernstein, referred to earlier, has drawn attention over the years.

All this brings me to the second of the two broad types of objections which I earlier noted are often raised with respect to genre theorists and their model of students learning language: namely, the charge that they focus primarily on the "products" rather than the "processes" of learning, taking up an essentially "transmission" model of teaching, making the learners merely "passive recipients" of the "product". Good teaching, it is suggested, is more concerned with the "processes" of learning than the "products", and those who are "preoccupied" with "products" simply "transmit" these to their students in ways that stifle individuality and/or independent learning. This objection seems to arise from a fundamental confusion about the relationship of "process" and "product". In fact, the latter represents one of a number of confusing dichotomies found in western traditions of thinking. Others include the distinctions made between "form" and "function", or "form" and "content", or "means" and "end", to mention only a few. A very interesting discussion of the pervasive nature of these dichotomies in the English language at least, is provided by Reddy (1979).

There is a limited sense in which, for explanatory purposes, one may well need to discuss both the processes and the products - or perhaps the outcomes - of learning. However, this should not allow us to believe, for the purposes of actual human activity, that the distinction is a real one. It is not, and on the whole those curriculum theorists who have perpetuated notions of "process" as being more important than "product" (e.g. Stenhouse, 1975) have done the cause of teaching and learning a disservice. The various systemicists who work with genres are uncompromisingly committed to the teaching of these, for a number of reasons, one of the most important of which is that a preoccupation with "process" is harmful. For reasons outlined above with respect to the objection to genres as symbols of conformity, I would argue that where "learning process" alone becomes the object of

the teacher's attention, the students are simply left to work things out for themselves. The fact is that even in the most "process oriented" classroom, some kind of "product" will need to emerge, and students must deduce its nature from aspects of the context of the classroom. Some will necessarily be better prepared to do this than others.
Hence, I suggest, responsible teachers are those who seek to make explicit the kinds of things their students need to do in language, helping them to define their goals for learning, as well as ways of achieving those goals. One of the most disturbing aspects of "process-oriented" classrooms as I have seen them in fact, has been their absence of clearly defined goals for learning.

A classroom in which goals are defined clearly, the students and teachers engaged in exploring and clarifying both the "content" for learning and the means of building that "content" in language, is not one in which the students are rendered "passive recipients". In fact, as several of the Australian genre theorists have now proposed it, a model for teaching and learning genres has been developed, drawing in part on pioneering work done by Gray (1982) and in part on more recent activity (e.g. Macken, 1989, Callaghan and Rothery, 1988). In addition, a series of books developing competence in a range of selected genres for use in the primary school is in preparation (Christie, Gray, Gray, Macken, Martin & Rothery, 1990 & in press). The model for teaching involves:

> (i) identification of the chosen genre with respect to a particular field;
>
> (ii) deconstruction of that genre, discussing its various elements of structure and the reasons why the genre is patterned and sequenced as it is;

(iii) joint construction of an instance of the genre by teacher and students, where that involves preparation of information relevant to the field or "content", and attention to the manner of writing and sequencing the elements of structure;

(iv) individual construction of an instance of the genre, with the same concerns both for "content" and generic pattern;

(v) creative use of the genre, where that can involve variations of some kind.

Capacity to use and to play with the genre, and hence to operate with independence in building meaning, it needs to be stressed, depends in the first instance upon knowing the genre. A more general principle must surely apply here: persons grow into independence, moving away from an initially fairly strong reliance upon models familiar to them, towards a confidence in using those models, so that they can experiment with and adapt them. Where the models are not readily available to them in the first place, however, they remain disadvantaged, their capacity to operate with independence compromised. The teacher's responsibility here is clear.

I shall turn now to Professor Gagne's questions, to which I alluded in starting this paper.

What types of knowledge produced in related fields can be useful for MTE itself?

In presenting my contribution to this symposium, the knowledge I have sought to use is that which comes from the steady development of systemic functional linguistics over the last 30 or 40 years. Such a theory, as I have sought to suggest rather sketchily, is itself based in a social theory. To study linguistics in Hallidays's terms is to engage in

the study of social processes, with a view to understanding these, and changing them where necessary. While systemics is itself to be thought of as a body of "theoretical linguistics", as a tradition it has always sought to be of use in applied contexts. Halliday (Paret, 1974) himself has made it clear that he has little use for the conventional distinctions between theoretical and applied areas of study.

Systemics has a great deal to offer the study of educational processes. Equally, the study of educational processes has a great deal to offer theoretical linguistics and its development.

Is research needed in the field of MTE?

Clearly, research is needed in the field. That is because, despite our best efforts, many mother tongue students in schools continue to achieve less well than one would really hope. There will always be a need to research and develop the field that is mother tongue education. As a case in point, while I have indicated some of the ways in which systemicists interested in genres have developed their work, I would draw attention to a number of matters requiring further work:

* research into language development from late childhood into adolescence, especially with respect to successful control of the written mode. Students who experience difficulty in their writing as they pass into secondary school frequently have a continuing pattern of failure because writing becomes increasingly important as a means of assessment. Derewianka is currently doing important work here;

* research into language development with respect to a growing control of registers as children grow and mature. Painter (in preparation) is currently working on this, but more needs to be done. Most seems to be known about the earliest years of life, but the of childhood, adolescence and entry to adulthood are quite underresearched;

* research into reading behaviour. Most of the work done by genre theorists to this point has focussed on oral language and writing, and while this has had importance for the teaching of reading, there remains a need to articulate a well developed theory of reading. Winser is currently working on this;

* assessment of students' performance and growth in language. Some work has been done in this area (e.g. Macken, 1988; Rothery,in prep.), but we need more;

* what to do in teaching and learning about language in the primary and secondary school. The British have recently had enquiries into this matter (the Kingman, 1988 and Cox, 1989 reports), but a great deal more requires to be done.

Can research in MTE be useful to related fields?

The study of linguistic problems in education can contribute in quite fundamental ways to other traditions of research, most notably to linguistic research itself. On this point it is worth noting what Hymes had to say a few years ago with respect to research into patterns of classroom language:

> The problem of the functions of language in the classroom is a challenge and an opportunity for the advancement of linguistics itself. Studying language in the classroom is not really "applied linguistics"; *it is really basic research.* (Hymes' emphasis) (Hymes, 1972, xviii)

Why is there a gap between research and teaching practices?

This is a time honoured problem, about which argument usually develops at teacher education conferences. While a great deal might be said about it, I suggest that one cause of the problem is that research and teaching are often seen as operating within the terms of very different paradigms about language, whether mother tongue or second language. Teachers teach, and researchers research, where no more than a passing relationship between the two sets of activities is often proposed. What it is to learn and use language is frequently not even conceived in the same terms for the purposes of the two sets of activities, although this fact is not always made very clear.

It is possible to overcome this kind of problem, where the activities of teaching and of research are related in terms of an overarching set of propositions about language and its role in human experience, not uniquely in the experience of an education. Hence, in this contribution I have tried to suggest what the consequences can be if one adopts a systemic linguistic position on language. To take such a view of language, as I have already said, is to subscribe to a social theory, which in turn has consequences for a pedagogical theory. The social

theory proposes that language is the principal social semiotic humans use in the construction and organisation of experience. In this theory, the learning of one's mother tongue is a necessary part of entering into the culture - its ways of meaning, its ways of "getting things done". To put the point another way, the processes of school learning may be seen as processes of learning how knowledge is valued in the culture, and how people build and use that knowledge; the mother tongue will be the principal resource in which such learning takes place.

Spolsky defined the scope of an educational linguistics as "the intersection of linguistics and related language sciences with formal and informal education" (Spolsky, 1978, 2). While not in one sense disagreeing with this I would nonetheless conclude by arguing as I have elsewhere recently:

> for the recognition of a new study in teacher education - one in which language and its role in the structuring and maintenance of human experience becomes a major focus of study, informing the professional preparation of teachers in a number of ways, and providing principled bases upon which teachers may intervene in promoting the growth of their students in language and hence in learning generally. (Christie, 1989,1)

While I have argued the particular contribution of systemic linguistics theory to such a study, I must note in conclusion that many other traditions of linguistics will make a contribution as well.

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